

Judicial Proceedings

Senate Bill 292: Criminal Law – Victims of Child Sex Trafficking and Human Trafficking – Safe Harbor and Service Response

February 14, 2023

****Letter of Information****

The Maryland Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers represents social workers statewide. We strongly support the intent of SB292: Criminal Law – Victims of Child Sex Trafficking and Human Trafficking – Safe Harbor and Service Response, which would ensure a non-criminal response that emphasizes services for youth apprehended for sex-trafficking and related crimes. As one witness in the House Bill hearing indicated, “this legislation is critical to victims of child sex-trafficking.”

We would, however, be remiss if we didn’t point out that when a youth with high intensity needs has parents or kin unwilling or unable to provide safe care, literally the only foster care placement option may be a hotel. As the witness from the public defender’s office pointed out, what some youth need is a bona fide ‘safe harbor’ in community-based facilities to meet their unique needs. Few would consider a hotel to offer that ‘safe harbor’ to a sex or human trafficked youth.

In addition, the vital importance of rapport building was emphasized as critical to engaging with victims in reparative work. If as anticipated, there are child victims in need of the ‘safe harbor’ of a foster care placement instead of detention, having a sufficient number of foster care caseworkers to attend to individual and family needs is also critical. Right now, the Department of Human Services has the highest vacancy rate among state agencies.

In short, we strongly support SB292, but know it cannot be successful without a full continuum of resources for victims, including foster care placements able to meet their unique needs and caseworkers in sufficient numbers to build the rapport that can be reparative.

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